DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 102 CE 037 987

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TITLE Recruitment Barriers to Vocational Education Programs as Perceived by Students, Teachers, Counselors and Administrators.
PUB DATE Dec 83
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Anaheim, CA, December 1983). For related documents, see ED 218 471 and ED 230 767.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Adults; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Educational Research; *Out of School Youth; Postsecondary Education; *School Holding Power; Student Attitudes; *Student Recruitment; Success; Teacher Attitudes; Vocational Directors; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Florida

ABSTRACT

A study identified barriers to successful recruitment and retention of out-of-school youth in vocational education. Personal interviews with directors of the 10 area vocational schools participating in the study provided data on the degree of utilization and success of 35 recruiting practices. The recruiting practice perceived as most successful was "encouraging high school students to take courses while completing graduation requirements"; the practice utilized most frequently was "construction of display booths." A telephone survey instrument gathered data on student perception of program barriers. Ten barriers were cited 42 percent of the time as the major reasons for leaving the vocational program. Two were institutional, six situational, and two dispositional. The most frequently cited institutional barrier was "need for more guidance"; the most frequently cited dispositional barrier was "postponed plans temporarily"; the most frequently cited situational barrier was "need for financial aid." A mailed questionnaire generated data from administrators, teachers, and counselors on perceived barriers to program completion. The program barriers they perceived as having the greatest impact were student financial needs, student ability and willingness to attend classes regularly, and lack of student self-motivation. (YLB)

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RECRUITMENT BARRIERS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, TEACHERS, COUNSELORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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A major concern of vocational educators has been the numbers of students leaving school before they are prepared for jobs. Vocational educators, recognizing this waste of human resources, have tried to attract such young people into vocational education programs. A wide variety of recruitment activities and techniques have been used to encourage students to enter vocational education programs rather than leaving school. Some of these efforts have met with success, while others have been less successful.

A review of the literature related to recruitment practices in vocational education reveals that far more attention has been placed on the positive aspects related to recruitment (i.e., motives for participation) rather than the negative considerations (i.e., recruitment barriers). Several research activities have sought to identify barriers to participation in vocational education. Simcoe (1979) conducted a study to identify barriers that have prevented large numbers of disadvantaged youth from entering vocational programs. Farning (1976) surveyed a sample of potential postsecondary students drawn from four Wisconsin vocational districts

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to obtain an identifiable set of barriers and deterrents which stop potential students from actually attending vocational-technical programs. Cross (1977), in a significant piece of work dealing with recruitment barriers, developed a model for categorizing, defining and identifying barriers which have stood in the path of successful recruitment activities. It is upon this model that this study is based.

Purpose

There is a need to systematically assess specific factors which are barriers to enrollment and program completion. The purpose of this research was to identify and describe barriers to successful recruitment and retention of students. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify and describe recruitment practices that have successfully attracted students to vocational programs.
2. To identify students who have re-enrolled in vocational education programs within the last year, and compare their perception of barriers with students who left before they completed programs and did not return.
3. To describe the barriers related to student recruitment and retention as perceived by vocational teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of ten area vocational schools identified as having recruitment programs that have attracted out-of-school youth and adults into vocational programs. A list of all 28 area vocational-technical schools was obtained from the Florida State Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education. From this list, vocational

administrators within each of the five regions were asked to identify two area vocational schools in their region which were exemplary in terms of successful recruiting practices. This purposive sampling technique provided the ten schools that were used as the sample for objective one in this study. The population for objective two consisted of students who had dropped out of the ten area vocational schools and students who had dropped out and returned to the school within the last year. A random sample of ten dropouts and ten re-enrollees from various service areas was selected from each school. The population for objective three was all faculty and professional staff in each of the ten schools. From this list of 717 faculty and staff members, a stratified random sample was selected using a table of random numbers. The total sample size was determined to be 260 based on a recommended sample selection table (Yamane, 1967).

Instrumentation

Three instruments were developed to gather the required information. The first instrument was designed to determine the degree of utilization and success of 35 recruitment practices that were identified in a review of literature (Farning, Wagner and Lambert, 1976; Cross, 1977; Kumer, 1977; Marienau and Klinger, 1977; Rubenson, 1977; Lieblong and McLondon, 1978; Simcoe, 1979; Florida Department of Education, 1981). The instrument used a four-point modified Likert type scale which allowed administrators to indicate their perception of the degree of success of each practice: very much, some, very little, or no success. A three-member jury of vocational directors reviwed the instrument to establish content validity.

A telephone survey instrument was developed to gather data on students who had enrolled in vocational training programs and compare their perceptions of program barriers with students who exited prior to program

completion and did not return. The instrument was comprised of 52 barriers identified through the review of literature. Each barrier identified was classified using a taxonomic system developed by Cross (1977). Barriers were situational (i.e., child care, finances, transportation), dispositional (i.e., how adults perceive themselves as learners), or institutional (i.e., school administrative factors that discourage students). For each barrier, students were asked to indicate if the factor caused them to drop out of school. To establish content validity, the instrument was pilot tested with students in several area vocational schools not included in the sample.

Objective three, to describe perceived barriers related to student recruitment and retention identified by teachers, counselors and administrators of area vocational programs, was measured by developing a 55-item questionnaire. Recruitment barriers, identified through related literature, and used in development of the instrument for measuring objective two, were refined into a format to allow teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to respond. Responses were gathered on a Likert type scale, with one open-ended question which allowed respondents to identify other significant program barriers. Content validity for the instrument was established by pilot testing the instrument in a nearby area vocational school which was not a part of the sample for the study. The final instrument was revised and refined based on the results of the pilot testing. A reliability test on the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of .92.

Data Collection

Data for objective one were collected using the interview schedule described earlier. At each visit, the director was interviewed at length

to determine recruitment practices that were currently being used in that school. Although the interview questionnaire was used to standardize the format of the interview, each school representative was encouraged to discuss other innovative recruitment practices currently being used. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and at each school a researcher conducted the interview personally.

Each school participating in the study was asked to supply a list of 20 students who could be contacted by telephone. School officials were asked to randomly select from their files ten students who had dropped out of the area vocational school and ten students who had dropped out and returned to the area vocational school within the last year. This generated a list of approximately 200 names to be used in the telephone interview. Six interviewers were trained to conduct the telephone interviews used to collect data from the student sample. Of the 200 students included in the sample, 166 contacts yielded an 83% response rate. Thirty-four students were unable to be contacted.

The data for objective three were collected by means of a mail survey. Each school participating in the study was asked to supply a complete list of all faculty and administrators currently involved in vocational programming. This request yielded a total list of 717 names. From this list a stratified random sample of 260 faculty and administrators was drawn. The sample was stratified on the basis of the percentage of the total population that each school staff represented. The initial mailing to all 260 faculty members was followed up closely with a second mailing to all non-respondents. Of the 260 faculty members originally surveyed, 220 responses (84.6%) were elicited with the two mailings. No attempt was made to follow up the 40 non-respondents.

Results

Objective One

Mean responses for each recruitment practice were computed. Each respondent indicated the degree of utilization and degree of success associated with each recruitment practice on a four-point Likert type scale which was coded as follows: 4—very much; 3—some; 2—very little; or 1—none. Table 1 displays the recruitment practices perceived by the vocational directors to be the most successful and most utilized. The practices directors perceived as being the most successful in area vocational schools were (a) encouraging high school students to take courses at the vocational school while completing high school graduation requirements, (b) advertising programs in local newspapers, (c) personal contacts with prospects by past and present students, (d) mass mailings of the school schedule, and (e) utilization of displays that illustrate successful graduates on the job.

The highest ranked recruitment practices, based on utilization, were (a) using displays at state fairs, exhibitions, and malls, (b) personal contacts with prospects by past and present students, (c) using slide-tape presentations, (d) visits to feeder schools by vocational staff and students, and (e) recruiting through community organizations that deal with special target groups.

Objective Two

The data for objective two were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of response to each item. Individual items were grouped as institutional, dispositional, or situational barriers. Each of the questions within categories was rank ordered based on frequency of response.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF PERCEPTIONS AND DIRECTORS REGARDING THE SUCCESS AND UTILIZATION OF RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Recruitment Practices	Success			Utilization		
	n	Mean	Rank	n	Mean	Rank
Encouraging high school students to take courses while completing graduation requirements at their high school.	10	4.00	1	10	3.20	11
Advertising programs in local newspapers.	8	3.87	2	9	3.55	9
Personal contacts with prospective students made by past and present students.	10	3.80	3	10	3.90	2
Mass mailings of the school schedule to prospective students.	7	3.71	4	10	2.90	16

TABLE 1

CONTINUED

Recruitment Practices	Success			Utilization		
	n	Mean	Rank	n	Mean	Rank
Utilization of special displays emphasizing the success of students who completed vocational programs.	6	3.66	5	10	2.30	22
Utilization of display booths at state fairs, exhibitions, malls, etc.	10	3.30	14	10	4.00	1
Development of slide tape presentations for distribution throughout the region.	9	3.55	8	10	3.90	2
Visits to feeder schools made by vocational school staff and students.	10	3.40	12	10	3.80	4

TABLE 1

CONTINUED

Recruitment Practices	Success			Utilization		
	n	Mean	Rank	n	Mean	Rank
Recruit through community organizations dealing with special target groups	10	3.60	6	10	3.70	5

NOTE: N=10

The data in Table 2 identify the 12 reasons most frequently cited by respondents as having an impact on their decision to drop out of school. There were 107 responses to questions relating to institutional barriers. The three highest-ranked institutional barriers were (a) needed more guidance, (b) believed the courses were not of suitable quality, and (c) lacked information about employment opportunities. These three barriers accounted for approximaely 39% of the responses to institutional barriers.

There were 178 responses to questions relating to dispositional barriers, three of which accounted for 38.7% of the total responses. These were (a) postponed plans temporarily, (b) decided to attend another school, and (c) age difference from other students.

For situational barriers, there were a total of 182 responses. Fifty-one percent of the responses were distributed among the first five barriers. These barriers included (a) needed financial aid, (b) needed at home, (c) could not fit job round school, (d) transportation problems, and (e) health problems.

To determine if differences existed between the way dropouts and returnees responded to barrier categories, mean responses were computed for each category. A t-test indicated significant differences existed between the mean scores of dropouts and re-enrollees, $t=2.04$, $p>.05$, regarding institutional barriers. However, no significant differences existed between the mean scores of dropouts and re-enrollees for dispositional or situational barriers.

TABLE 2

RANK ORDER OF THE BARRIERS IMPACTING ON

RESPONDENTS' DECISION TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL

Barrier	n	%/N	Rank
Postponed plans temporarily (D)	42	25.3	1
Needed financial aid (S)	23	13.8	2
Needed at home (S)	19	11.4	3
Could not fit part-time job around school (S)	18	10.8	4
Transportation was a problem (S)	17	10.2	5
Health problems (S)	17	10.2	6
Needed more guidance (I)	16	9.6	7
Decided to attend another school (D)	15	9.0	8
Could not attend class regularly (S)	15	9.0	9
Believed courses were not suitable quality	14	8.4	10
Age difference from other students (D)	13	7.8	11
Lacked information about employment possibilities	12	6.0	12

NOTE: N = 166

Types of barriers: (D) = Dispositional

(S) = Situational

(I) = Institutional

Objective Three

For objective three, administrators, teachers, and counselors responded to 50 barriers indicating the degree to which they believed each barrier influenced students to drop out of vocational programs. A four-point Likert type scale was used on which responses could range from no influence (coded 1) to strong influence (coded 4). Of the 220 respondents, 36 (16.3%) were administrators, 174 (79%) were teachers, and 10 (4.5%) were counselors.

Table 3 summarizes the mean responses for the ten highest-ranked barriers. Those barriers perceived by the total group of respondents as having the greatest impact on whether or not a student drops out of school were (a) a need for financial aid, (b) failure to attend class, and (c) lack of student motivation.

As in objective two, barriers were grouped into categories as being either institutional, dispositional, or situational. Mean scores were calculated for each group of barriers by respondent group (administrators, teachers, counselors). To determine if differences existed in the way each of the respondent subgroups perceived each of the three barrier categories, the data were subjected to a one-way analysis of variance.

The calculated F values did not surpass the critical value needed for significance ($p<.05$) for institutional and dispositional barriers. Therefore, the data did not support the idea of significant differences in the way administrators, teachers, and counselors responded to these barrier categories. However, the calculated F value for the main effects of respondent groups by situational barriers was 6.18 ($p<.05$). A Duncan's post-hoc comparison showed that significant differences existed among the means of all three respondent groups on situational barriers.

TABLE 3

MEAN SCORES FOR BARRIER BY RESPONDENT CATEGORY

Barrier	All Respondents		Administrators		Teachers		Counselors	
	n	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean	n	Mean
There is a need for financial aid on the part of the students.	219	3.07	36	3.27	172	3.07	10	2.20
Students have a lack of motivation.	218	3.06	36	3.11	171	3.05	10	3.00
Students cannot or will not attend class regularly	219	3.01	36	3.05	172	3.01	10	2.90
Personal financial needs of the students are too great.	216	2.92	36	3.11	169	2.89	10	2.50
Students are easily frustrated.	214	2.57	36	2.58	167	2.56	10	2.50

TABLE 3

CONTINUED

Barrier	All Respondents n	All Respondents Mean	Administrators n	Administrators Mean	Teachers n	Teachers Mean	Counselors n	Counselors Mean
Students cannot accept the responsibility associated with the program.	216	2.79	36	2.77	169	2.79	10	2.90
Students decide to accept a job related to their vocational training.	217	2.71	36	3.05	171	2.64	9	2.66
Students are undecided about their future.	216	2.71	36	2.71	170	2.70	10	2.70
Students have the attitude that government support is better than working.	217	2.70	36	2.61	170	2.72	10	2.70
Students cannot fit school around part-time job.	218	2.58	36	2.50	171	2.62	10	2.30

Conclusions and Discussion

The major purpose of this study was to describe barriers to successful recruitment and retention of out-of-school youth as perceived by students, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Based upon the findings of the study, the following conclusions and discussion were developed for each objective.

Data for objective one were gathered through personal interviews with the directors of the ten area vocational schools participating in the study. Two major conclusions may be drawn based upon an analysis of the results of those interviews:

1. The recruitment practice perceived to be the most successful by area vocational school directors was "encouraging high school students to take courses while completing graduation requirements at their high school."
2. The recruitment practice utilized most frequently by area vocational school directors was the "construction of display booths at fairs, exhibitions, malls, etc."

Based on the data collected, there was an obvious difference between recruitment practices administrators perceived to be successful and recruitment practices actively being used to attract students. The recruitment practice perceived to be most successful was "to encourage high school students to take courses while completing graduation requirements." This practice ranked eleventh in degree of utilization. Likewise, the recruitment practice utilized most frequently was "display booths at state fair, exhibitions, schools and malls," was ranked fourteenth in terms of perceived degree of success. Clearly, there was a discrepency between what area vocational school directors believed was an important recruitment prac-

tice and what they actually did to attract new students. The recruitment practice which received the overall highest ranking in terms of frequency of use and perceived success, "personal contacts with prospective students made by past and present students," may be the most successful recruitment practice available.

Of the 32 barriers investigated under objective two, ten barriers were cited 42% of the time as the major reasons for leaving the vocational program. Of those ten barriers, two were institutional, six were situational, and two were dispositional (Table 2). The institutional barrier cited most frequently as a major factor in deciding to leave school was "the need for more guidance," while the dispositional barrier cited most frequently was "postponed plans temporarily," and the situational barrier cited most frequently was "needed financial aid to stay in the program."

Based on the data collected, it would appear that many students leave the area vocational school programs because they are not receiving adequate guidance or they are in financial distress. Either of these factors could explain why many students indicated that they had postponed their plans to attend school temporarily. It appears that an increase in career guidance and counseling, as well as increased availability of financial aid, would help to keep more students in vocational programs. While the results of the t test suggest a significant difference in the way returnees and dropouts answer the questions related to institutional variables, it should be noted that the means generated by this group of variables were calculated on the total number of positive responses for these questions, and did not include respondents who indicated that several of those questions were not applicable. Therefore, it appears that the students who left the programs did so because of some perceived degree of

dissatisfaction with the institution rather than some personal inadequacies on their part.

Of the students who returned to school, 57% were recruited back to school through one or more of the recruitment activities identified in objective one. This suggested that approximately 43% of those who returned to school did so on their own volition with little or no prompting from the recruitment activities identified by this study. The data also suggest that the most successful recruitment activities were personal contacts by a school faculty member or a former or present student. Use of the media, both electronic and printed, was also identified by returnees as a successful recruitment practice.

Data for objective three were generated from a questionnaire mailed to 260 administrators, teachers, and counselors participating in the study. This sample was randomly drawn from a master list of 717 administrators, teachers, and counselors within the ten participating area vocational schools.

1. The program barriers perceived by this group as having the greatest impact on program completion were "the financial need of the student," "the ability and willingness of the student to attend class regularly," and "a lack of self motivation on the part of the student."
2. Conversely, those barriers perceived by administrators, teachers, and counselors as having the least impact on program completion were "students' perceptions of an unsafe school environment," "unavailability of remedial instruction," "racial prejudice," "admission procedures which were difficult," and "age differences among the students."

Based on the data for objective three, it would appear that there is no difference in the way administrators, teachers, and counselors responded to questions grouped as institutional or dispositional barriers. However, when responding to the group of questions grouped as situational or dispositional barriers, administrators perceived the impact of situational barriers to be the greatest, while counselors perceived them to be the least. It is interesting to note that there was little difference between the major barriers perceived by faculty groups in objective three and the major barriers perceived by the students themselves in objective two. One major difference to be noted, however, is that faculty groups as a whole felt that students often times failed to complete programs because of lack of responsible behavior, poor motivation, and poor attitude. Conversely, students did not perceive their behavior as irresponsible, but rather as situations over which they had no control.

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